



Preventing Animal Warts

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One of the most common reasons an animal is denied entry to a livestock exhibition or a pet show is warts. This infectious disease is highly contagious, and easily spread to other animals. The presence of warts is not only unsightly, but also frequently diminishes the value of animal, by damaging the hide.

Livestock and pet owners should be aware of the signs of warts, and know how to control the disease to prevent its spread.

A Contagious Disease

Warts are caused by a highly contagious virus. Also known as papillomas, warts are small, cauliflower-shaped growths. Multiple papillomas (a condition called papillomatosis) occur on very young animals. Older animals are more likely to exhibit single warts. Multiple warts are easier to diagnose than a single papilloma.

How long the wart lesions persist depends on the type of virus, area affected and susceptibility of the individual animal is.

Direct contact, carriers and insects can spread the disease. While most wart-causing viruses are species-specific, all animals,

including birds and fish, can contract some type of warts. The disease, however, most often affects cattle, horses and dogs.

Cattle: In cattle, warts are usually found on the head, neck and shoulders. Occasionally, they'll surface on the back and abdomen or inside the ears. Infections appear approximately 8 weeks after exposure, and can continue for more than a year.

The infectious nature of papillomatosis can easily become a herd problem, particularly in large groups of young, susceptible cattle.

Once an animal has had papillomatosis, it usually develops immunity within three weeks to four weeks after the initial infection. Reoccurrences of the disease are likely related to loss of immunity.

Horses: Much like cattle, young horses, with immature immune systems, are most susceptible. Small, scattered growths can develop on the nose, lips, eyelids, legs, genitals, udder and inside of the ears. Often, warts appear alongside mild abrasions.

The disease, considered benign in equine, regresses within a few months in younger horses, as they mature. In older horses, the disease may persist for more than one year.

- Wart-causing viruses can be spread by direct contact, secondary carriers and possibly insects.
- Papillomas have been reported on all domestic animal species, birds and even fish.

Dogs: Papillomas can infect dogs in three different ways. Mucous membrane papillomatosis, which primarily affects younger dogs, surfaces in and around the mouth, from the lips to the esophagus. The infection can interfere with a dog's ability to swallow and chew. Another form infecting mucous membranes exhibits a very similar appearance. However, those lesions are usually solitary and appear in older dogs. Some breeds are more susceptible than others. A third type most commonly develops on the abdomens of young, mature dogs.

Other species: Papillomas take on various appearances in other species, including goats, deer and, rarely, sheep and pigs. Cats will display lesions that do not have the typical "warty" look.

Treatment and Prevention

Veterinarians disagree about the best treatment for papillomas. Warts can be removed surgically; however, removal must be done to mature or regressing lesions. If done too early, surgery can stimulate increased numbers or growth of those present or reoccurrence of the disease.

Isolation of infected animals is always a good practice. However,

the long incubation period may allow other animals to be exposed to the virus before early symptoms are recognized.

Vaccines are an effective control measure—especially in a herd situation. However, immunity may develop too late to prevent the disease in animals exposed to the virus before vaccination.

Cattle already infected with the disease receive very little benefit from a vaccine, according to some reports. That's why vaccinations should be given at an early age—as young as four weeks to six weeks old. Vaccinations should be repeated in four weeks to six weeks, then again at one year of age.

Up to six months may pass before the effectiveness of a vaccination program becomes evident. The program should continue for **at least one year after** the last wart disappears from the herd, as the premises may still be contaminated with the virus. Barns, equipment and stalls must be disinfected to kill any organisms that may be lingering in the environment to prevent future reinfection.

A veterinarian should be consulted to develop an effective, long-term control program on the farm.

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